

MICHIGAN'S LGBTQ+ NEWS SOURCE SINCE 1993

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**GIGI'S EMPLOYEE MURDERED**  
Detroit police weighing  
hate crime charges

**WHAT WASN'T SAID**  
Debates ignored  
LGBTQ+ issues — why  
silence may be a gift

**DRAG, DRAMA AND DANCING**  
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By Jordyn Bradley





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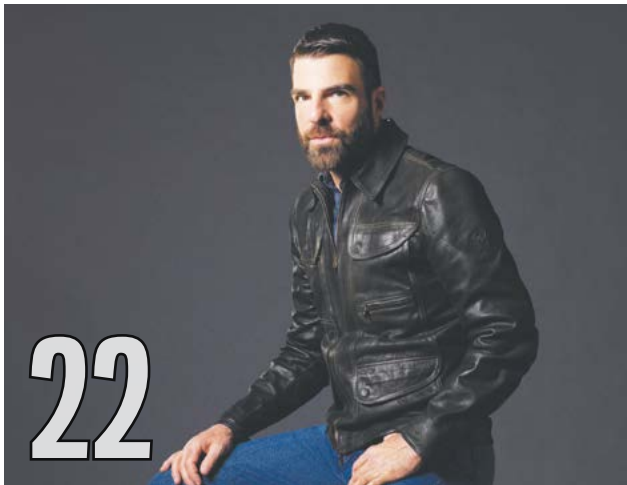
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Amber and Ken Long. Photo: Andrew Potter

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# 5 Queer Things You Can Do Right Now-ish

BY LIAM CLYMER

With all eyes on the election (and the associated politically driven stress slated to drag on for the next few weeks), it can be a relief to turn to queer-aligned events for a bit of a breather. Assuming you've made a plan to vote — and have strongly encouraged at least five friends to make a plan of their own — some well-earned me-time is certainly in order. Head out for a book talk with ESPN journalist Katie Barnes, go see the live "Two Dykes and a Mic" podcast show or "The Grown-Ups" at the Ringwald Theatre, or take advantage of an opportunity to support a great cause at the annual Equality Michigan gala.



Katie Barnes. Photo: X / @katie\_barnes3

## Learn About LGBTQ+ Athletics with Katie Barnes

With transgender athletes in the political crosshairs, it's important to center the voices of those affected. Award-winning LGBTQ+ sports journalist and author Katie Barnes will share their expertise on gender in sports on Oct. 23 at University of Michigan Museum of Art. In an interview talkback and Q&A, Barnes will walk audience members through the findings they outline in their recent book, "Fair Play: How Sports Shape the Gender Debates."

Oct. 23, 6:30-8 p.m., UMMA (525 State St., Ann Arbor). More information at [events.umich.edu/event/126525](https://events.umich.edu/event/126525).



Yuval Sharon. Photo: Lyric Opera of Chicago

## Meet Detroit Opera Artistic Director Yuval Sharon

Yuval Sharon, Detroit Opera's Gary L. Wasserman artistic director, will hold a discussion and book signing on Oct. 22 at Wasserman Projects in Detroit focused on Sharon's book, "A New Philosophy of Opera." The book dives into Sharon's approach as opera's "disrupter-in-residence," including decisions like performing "La Bohème" in reverse. Throughout, Sharon champions an "anti-elite" take on opera, portraying the art form as a dynamic, ever-evolving force rather than an artform that is fading away in modern times. While you're there, don't miss "Soft Serve," a two-person exhibit featuring Machine Dazzle and Gracelee Lawrence celebrating the "maximal and fantastical force of Mother Nature," according to press materials.

Oct. 22, 7-8:30 p.m., Wasserman Projects (3434 Russell St., Detroit). RSVP at [cart.detroitopera.org/do-events/yuval-sharon-book-signing](https://cart.detroitopera.org/do-events/yuval-sharon-book-signing).



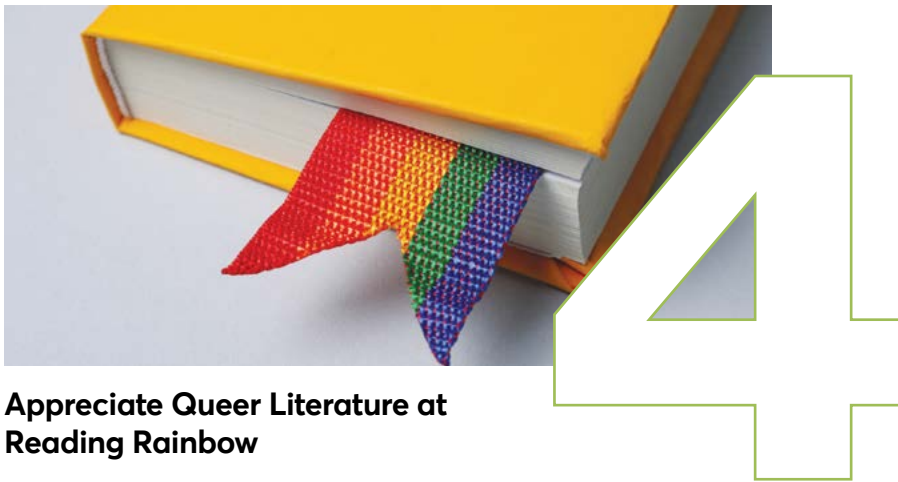
Scene from "The Grown Ups" at Ringwald Theatre. Photo: Brandy Joe Pambleck

## See 'The Grown-Ups' at the Ringwald Theatre

The Ringwald Theatre's latest production shines a spotlight on modern-day issues that the LGBTQ+ community can sympathize with. "The Grown-Ups" takes place at a summer camp and is focused on the counselors trying to shape the next generation of leaders. From this backdrop comes a powerful story that tackles themes such as the dangers of othering and extremism — concepts far too familiar to queer individuals. To truly engross audience members in the feeling of summer camp, select performances will be done outside in front of an actual campfire. And for all other showings, The Ringwald promises an immersive theater experience that places viewers at camp alongside the main characters.

Oct. 11- Nov. 4, Fridays, Saturdays and Mondays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m., The Ringwald Theatre (290 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale). Further details can be found at [theringwald.com/productions/grown-ups](https://theringwald.com/productions/grown-ups).





## Appreciate Queer Literature at Reading Rainbow

While LGBTQ+ books clubs for adults are common, queer youth and teenagers have just as much of a need, if not more, for taking in queer stories that enhance their worldview. Luckily, Ferndale Area District Library, in collaboration with Affirmations, hosts a social club for grades 4-8 that addresses this very need. Reading Rainbow meets every fourth Tuesday of the month and explores stories by LGBTQ+ authors or with LGBTQ+ themes. This month, attendees will have the chance to talk about "Drew Leclair Crushes The Case," a story by openly bi author Katryn Bury.

But even if guests haven't gotten the time to read the book yet, the library still encourages them to attend the Reading Rainbow events. They emphasize that anyone is welcome, and that a good chunk of the meeting time goes into socializing and crafts.

Oct. 22, 6 p.m., Ferndale Area District Library (222 E. Nine Mile, Ferndale). Find out more at [fadl.org/reading-rainbow](http://fadl.org/reading-rainbow).



2023 Equality Michigan gala. Courtesy photo

## Get Tickets for Mission Equality '80s Prom

With perms and mullets back in style, it seems only fitting that this year's Equality Michigan gala takes us back to the 1980s. This prom-style party, set for Nov. 9, will offer space to celebrate this year's achievements and highlight future plans. There will be a DJ, a food truck and an open bar — everything you need for a night to remember.

Executive Director Erin Knott said the theme of the event has significance to LGBTQ+ history. "This year feels extra special because we are gathering Michigan's LGBTQ+ community in such a fun, nostalgic way," Knott told BTL. "The '80s were a pivotal era for LGBTQ+ rights, and now, decades later, we can honor how far we've come by dancing the night away in an authentic, inclusive and welcoming space with community leaders, advocates and allies who help us continue to fight for equality in our state."

Nov. 9, 8-12 p.m., 215 West (215 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale). Snag your spot early at [equalitymi.org/events/mission-equality-2024](http://equalitymi.org/events/mission-equality-2024).

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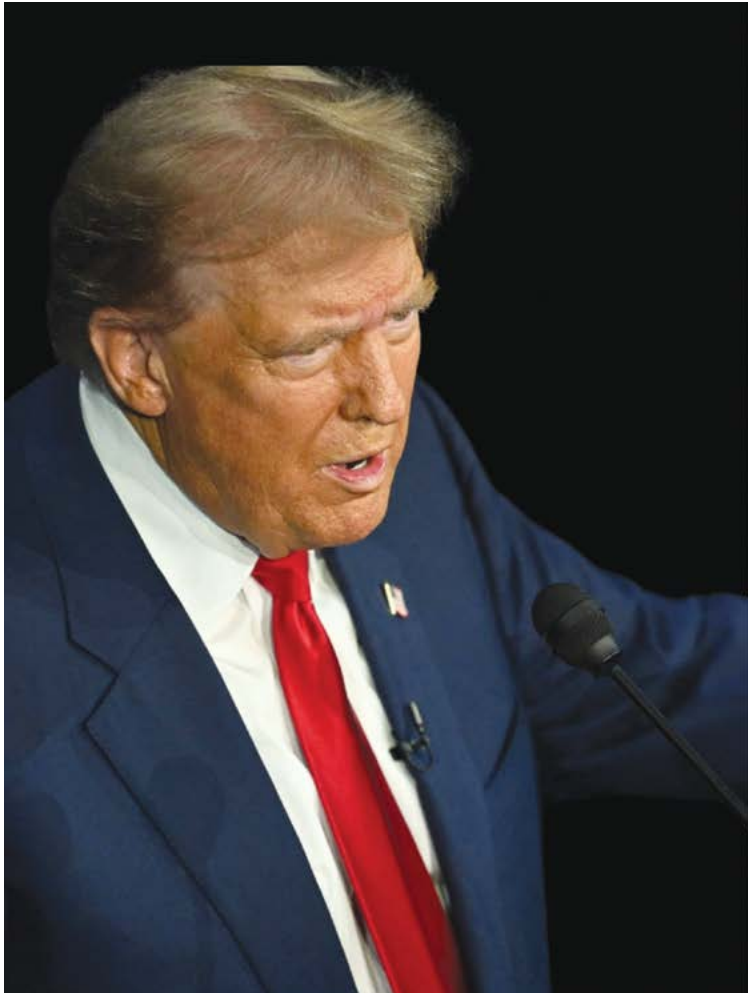
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# What Wasn't Said At The Debates: Why There Was a Lack of LGBTQ+ Coverage In an Era of Mass LGBTQ+ Politicization

And why it might not be all bad that the debates left these topics untouched



Former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris on the debate stage. Photos: CBS

BY LIAM CLYMER

“Kamala is for they/them. President Trump is for you.”

That’s an actual tagline being used by the Trump campaign as a part of a new series of ads that began their rollout in mid-September.

Throughout the presidential race, the weaponization of trans identities has become a key strategy in riling up Trump’s base. By pandering to these perspectives, Trump has further cemented himself

as dangerously transphobic — adding to his already long record of anti-LGBTQ+ malfeasance and harmful rhetoric.

Yet, when it came time for him and Vice President Kamala Harris to appear in front of a national audience, the two shifted away from LGBTQ+ topics, apart from one outburst from Trump, in which he repeated a claim from his rallies about Harris’ purported support of gender-affirming care for prisoners. The same goes for the vice presidential debate — almost zip. Walz briefly brought

up book bannings, which typically target LGBTQ+ stories, but didn’t go any further than that.

Instead, economy, immigration and abortion topics dominated each night of debate. But why the shift in rhetoric from Trump and lack of acknowledgment from Harris?

Michigan State University professor John Kuk, who specializes in research regarding the politics of inequality and voting rights, said that the shift had to do with appealing to undecided

voters as the race enters its final days. “I think the main reason [for a lack of LGBTQ+ commentary] is we are now into general

election mode compared to primary election mode,” Kuk said. “Transgender issues are something that rattles up the Republican base. So it is a very important topic to discuss during the Republican primary and is something that Republican voters care a lot about, but it is not a topic that undecided voters or swing voters are much interested in.”

Senior resource manager of Stand With Trans Logan Harding said he had mixed feelings on the lack of LGBTQ+ coverage at the debates.

“As somebody who works in a non-profit, doing this work for trans people, we want trans issues to get their fair share of attention and air time, because that’s how we make change happen,” Harding told BTL. “As an individual speaking, I was actually a little grateful that trans issues didn’t come up in the debate. To me, I

feel like we all kind of knew it would have given a platform to more of that rhetoric that would be used to hurt and alienate people.”

He added, “Ultimately, trans lives and humanity are not up for debate, and I appreciated that they were not treated as a tool for building drama and division in the televised presidential and vice presidential debates.”

Harding said that burnout from trying to advocate for trans issues can be especially prevalent when political rhetoric is particularly heated. The debate provided a break from the onslaught.

Election Day is Nov. 5. Visit [vote411.org](https://vote411.org) and [michiganvoting.org](https://michiganvoting.org) to learn about the candidates and issues on your ballot and to make a voting plan.



“I know for me and for a lot of the people I’ve met who’ve been advocates for a while, it is exhausting because we’re out here on a daily basis just trying to be like, ‘We’re normal people, just trying to live normal lives,’” Harding said. “Then the people on the TV are saying they’re trying to ruin your children or whatever — like, why are you setting me back like that?”

And while the approach to LGBTQ+ issues and the need for less weaponization is important, Kuk said that doesn’t mean LGBTQ+ issues should just be forgotten about altogether. He added that issues important to minority groups can be salient in swing states, when they mobilize. In fact, according to analysis from The Washington Post, Biden wouldn’t have won in 2020 without the support of LGBTQ+ voters in swing states.

In the future, Kuk said there are two main ways LGBTQ+ issues can be brought to the main stage. One is through money — simply put, campaigns pay attention to where their money is coming from. The second is more complicated.

“The interesting thing to look at is how these issues are tied,” he said. “So, for example, issues that matter to LGBTQ+ voters can be tied to a bigger issue.”

“The Trump campaign was trying to tie transgender issues with the immigration issue,” Kuk explained about the presidential debate, referring to Trump’s comment directed at Harris that, “Now she wants to do transgender operations on illegal aliens who are in prison.”

Outside of that, Kik acknowledged the ads released by the Trump campaign “trying to tie how extreme Kamala Harris is on transgender issues back to the issue of immigration.”

“It’s a hard balance, because the way Trump delivered it sounded like an insane claim because it was basically some random right-wing conspiracy theory that not many people understood,” Kuk said. “So it’s a hard balance, but if there is a successful way of connecting a key issue with issues that matter to LGBTQ+ voters, then I can see how they will be discussed more widely during election season.”

After all, as Kuk emphasized, the importance of making minority voters feel seen and heard is critical. “Lower efficacy and feeling of disenfranchisement, then followed by lower turnout, is a typical process when minority voters feel excluded or not heard by politicians,” he said.

# LGBT Detroit Celebrates 30 Years

With a keynote address from Lt. Gov. Gilchrist, the gala highlighted progress and future aspirations

BY LIAM CLYMER

For M. Terrence Samson, one of the LGBT Detroit’s longest-tenured board members, being present for the Black-founded and led organization’s 30th-anniversary gala was an “exhilarating and a rewarding experience” — not just because of what LGBT Detroit has accomplished, but because of what they’re aspiring to do in the future.

From its inception as Kick Publishing Company, LGBT Detroit has grown over the last 30 years to provide services, social programs, events and three safe spaces across the Detroit area. Each resource contributes to the organization’s mission to create visibility for LGBTQ+ Detroiters and their allies.

And on the night of Oct. 12, with an Afrofuturism theme as the gala’s backdrop, attendees couldn’t help but consider the next 30 years of LGBT Detroit.

Samson, who is treasurer, said Executive Director A. Nzere Kwabena has done an excellent job of building up the community of LGBT Detroit, and that in the future, he’d only want to see it expand further in the hands of younger generations.

“[I’d like to see] people continuing to support each other and build positive relationships, in addition to passing on the torch to the next generation of our community members who are continuing with community service and social justice,” Samson said.

He added that over time, the social climate has become more open to LGBTQ+ identities, allowing for more individuals to “walk in their truth.”

When keynote speaker Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist took the stage, he emphasized that while much has been accomplished, community members can’t stop pushing as they look forward.

Gilchrist shared how in 2019, Massachusetts Rep. Seth Moulton came to Michigan to have a conversation with young Black leaders as a part of his 2020 election bid. Gilchrist asked the congressman if he’d heard of the term “Afro-nostalgia,” which he had not.

“You ain’t ever heard of Afro-nostalgia because Afro-nostalgia isn’t a thing — see, Black people are not backwards-looking people because the past was typically a little bit worse for them,” Gilchrist said.

He explained that it’s important to remember the Black creatives who persevered, even under discriminatory circumstances. “You had these amazing creative minds, like Octavia Butler, who invented a genre called Afrofuturism, because our imagination was so big that it could overcome the discrimination and overcome the prejudice to help imagine and dream what was



(Top) Attendees at the LGBT Detroit anniversary gala. (Bottom) Lt. Gov. Gilchrist presents the organization with a proclamation. Photos: Chris Sutton

possible going forward if we were free,” Gilchrist said.

In an interview with BTL at the event, Gilchrist shared that he believes LGBT Detroit is one of those persevering organizations, citing the organization’s long history of working on behalf of Detroiters.

“LGBT Detroit is an amazing service and advocacy organization,” Gilchrist said. “There’s a generation of Detroiters whose lives have been changed by this organization. People have gotten access to resources, gotten access to healthcare... people who feel safer as Detroiters because they found this organization and the community that is embedded in it.”

He noted that Kwabena was one of the most selfless people he knew — stepping in to lend a voice on behalf of the LGBTQ+ community when Gilchrist formed the Michigan coronavirus task force on racial disparities.

Gilchrist said that when looking at what lies ahead, LGBTQ+ voters must let their voices be heard. He added that through voting, LGBTQ+

representatives and allies come into power and pass legislation that keeps the LGBTQ+ community “respected and protected under the law.”

Gilchrist stressed the importance of being a good ally and shared the ways they can assist the LGBTQ+ community. “You can’t be an ally to people you don’t respect,” Gilchrist told BTL with conviction. “I’m always excited to come and build relationships with members of the LGBTQ+ community across the state of Michigan — and that’s not just going to Pride parades. That’s going to service centers, going to healthcare facilities, like Corktown Health, and really supporting them and the resources they provide to the community.”

“Meeting people where they are — that’s what good allies do, and I’m proud to do that,” he said.

Before the night ended, Gilchrist presented LGBT Detroit with a proclamation signed by him and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer commemorating 30 years and thanking the organization for its service.



# How Michigan Became a Refuge for These Parents and Their Trans Kid

After their daughter came out as trans in 2023, the Longs were relieved not to be living in Florida anymore



Amber and Ken Long at their home in Royal Oak. Photo: Andrew Potter

**BY JORDYN BRADLEY**

Over a decade after Ken and Amber Long relocated to Michigan from Florida with their two children in 2012, it feels like their move was meant to be. When their daughter, now 21, came out to them as trans in 2023, they were already living in what is considered a safe haven for transgender people. They say their experience navigating that with her would've likely been different had they still lived in Florida, a state with

some of the strictest anti-trans legislation.

The couple, who identified as Republican, Evangelical Christians at the time, began questioning where their theological and ideological views fell before leaving Florida. When they saw how their party and religion so easily aligned with beliefs that they didn't feel represented them, it pushed the Longs to begin a religious deconstruction and to rethink their views.

"It really alienated us from that group, and it pushed us deeper into this idea that

we are not what the rest of our ideological group [became]. And it really pushed us to the fringes of that group," says Ken.

Moving to Royal Oak, which they call "a little blue pocket," was mind-opening for the Longs, who began to lean toward more progressive beliefs.

"We didn't have a structured support system already here for us, so it allowed us to be more exploratory and listen to other perspectives, and have friends that were outside of our religious bubble in Florida,"

says Ken.

According to the Human Rights Campaign, as of August this year, nearly 40% of transgender youth (ages 13-17) in America live in states that have passed bans on gender-affirming care. Unfortunately, the situation for queer youth is even more grim: Of the 50 states, 26 — over half — have implemented these regulations. Additionally, more than 350 transgender and gender nonconforming people have lost their lives to fatal anti-trans violence



in the past decade. Florida and Texas were collectively home to almost 20% of all victims.

The Advocate has even gone so far as to issue a “do not travel” advisory on Florida for trans people on its Adult Trans Legislative Risk Assessment Map. Political advocacy group Equality Florida has issued a similar advisory. Under Florida law, transgender people can be arrested for using the bathroom that aligns with their gender identity.

“It’s definitely easier to live with a positive outlook when we live somewhere like Michigan. We know people who have left unsafe states in search of a better life to live their authentic self, or for an opportunity for their kids to live their best life,” says Amber.

Florida vs. Michigan:  
a stark contrast for  
trans people

The Longs say their biggest concern when their daughter came out to them wasn’t about if she would regret it; they welcomed her new identity as “the next adventure.” Instead, they worried about how society might judge and treat her, fearing it would make her life more difficult.

“I just worried about things that probably most parents go through, like what is going to happen to her in her life. I didn’t have fear about where she is geographically at this moment, though,” says Amber.

The Advocate’s risk assessment of Michigan notes a “low risk” for transgender people living in the state over the next two years (the map was published in February 2024). It was deemed “low risk” and not “no risk” in part due to being a swing state. Despite a Democratic trifecta and a narrow 20-18 Democratic majority in the State Senate since 2022, shifts in political dynamics can occur rapidly, especially with such a slim margin and the potential for complacency.

“In Michigan, we’re in a good place right now in terms of some things we’ve accomplished in our state, and that’s a result of elections,” Jay Kaplan, staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan’s LGBTQ+ Rights Project, tells BTL.

In Michigan, strong pro-human rights leadership, particularly from Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, has made a significant

impact. She established the state’s first-ever LGBTQ+ commission, amended the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to reaffirm and expand protections for sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression (ensuring no one can be fired from their jobs or evicted from their home for how they identify), opposed and vetoed any anti-trans legislation that has fallen on her desk, vetoed anti-trans budget language that sought to deny gender-affirming healthcare and banned conversion therapy. Earlier this year, Whitmer signed a package of commonsense, pro-family bills that remove criminal prohibitions on surrogacy, safeguarding this pathway to parenthood and establishing clear guidelines for establishing paternity in these arrangements.

“But all of those things that have been achieved as a result of those elections could be wiped out by another election,” Kaplan cautions. “And that’s why it’s not just


“Amber and I have often speculated if our lives and our daughter’s life would have been different had we not moved from Florida to Michigan. With all things being equal, we couldn’t fathom how much more complex it is for LGBTQ+ folks to live in a state that’s actively legislating against your rights.”

— Ken Long

about, ‘This is what we’ve accomplished and we can sit back and rest on our laurels.’ It’s also about how we maintain and retain that progress, and be in a position to be able to go further too. And to never take it for granted.”

Recently, Whitmer reflected on the LGBTQ+ protections she has championed in an interview with BTL. During the conversation, she emphasized that, while these protections can’t be undone, a Supreme Court decision could undermine them. “A federal law could absolutely supersede what we’ve done,” she said. “And that’s why whether it is LGBTQ+ rights or



See **The Longs**, page 20



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# Detroit Police Weighing Hate Crime Charges in Murder of Howard Brisendine

## What a local advocacy group suggests for safer app meetups

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

A 17-year-old from Michigan has been charged with murder in the fatal stabbing of a gay Detroit man, a crime that authorities suggest may have been driven by hatred based on the victim's sexual orientation. The accused, Ahmed Al-Alikhan, is facing charges of first-degree murder, felony murder and unlawful driving away of an automobile following the death of a 64-year-old out gay man, Howard Brisendine.

According to the Detroit Police Department, Al-Alikhan met Brisendine on a dating app, allegedly targeting him because he was gay. Authorities say that on Sept. 24, Al-Alikhan visited Brisendine's home, stabbed him multiple times, and then fled in Brisendine's car. Al-Alikhan was arrested on Oct. 1 in Dearborn and turned over to Detroit authorities.

The apparently targeted nature of the crime has prompted Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy to charge Al-Alikhan as an adult. Worthy noted that Al-Alikhan is only a few weeks shy of his 18th birthday and that the alleged facts of the case warrant the adult charge. "It is hard to fathom a more planned series of events in this case," Worthy said in a statement. "Unfortunately, the set of alleged facts are far too common in the LGBTQ+ community. We will bring justice to Mr. Brisendine."

The brutal murder has shaken Detroit's LGBTQ+ community, especially in light of rising hate crime statistics across the country. FBI statistics from 2022 reveal a 19% increase in anti-LGBTQ+ hate crimes compared to the previous year, reflecting a troubling national trend.

The Fair Michigan Justice Project (FMJP), which aids Michigan law enforcement and prosecutors in solving serious crimes against the LGBTQ+ community, is actively involved in this case. FMJP Director of Outreach and Advocacy

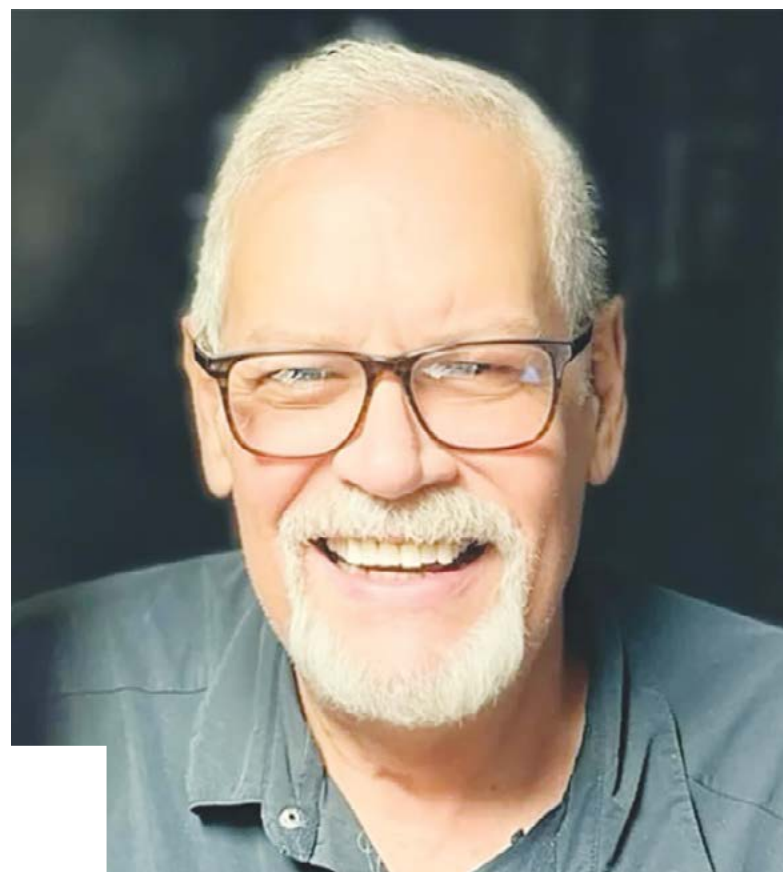
Julisa Abad encourages dating app users to stay safe. "Let people know where you're going," she tells BTL. "This can be as simple as sharing the names they gave you or sharing a screenshot of a screen name, just so that we have a starting point should something happen. You can also share your location with somebody so there are timestamps showing when you arrived and left."

Abad says that before meeting up, it's a good idea to drive by the location first to become more familiar with the neighborhood. She also advises people to avoid parking in driveways — instead, park in the street if you can, facing the direction that you'll take to leave later. Most of all, Abad says, "Trust your gut feeling if something doesn't feel right. Go with your intuition."

Brisendine, a longtime resident of Detroit, was a well-known figure

neighbor, discovered his body on Sept. 29 after Brisendine failed to show up for work. Mandujano went to Brisendine's house, noticed his car was missing and, upon entering, found him dead from multiple stab wounds.

"After Howard missed a shift, we became concerned because that just wasn't like him," Mandujano told BTL. "I'd noticed his car was missing a few days earlier, but didn't think too much of it, but after he missed two shifts, we decided to go over and check on the house. I went over with another Gigi's employee and the front door wasn't completely latched, so we were able to push it open." Mandujano discovered Brisendine's body and a "whole lot of blood." The coworker immediately called the police, who confirmed Brisendine's death and began



Howard Brisendine. Courtesy photo

*“Let people know where you’re going. This can be as simple as sharing the names they gave you or sharing a screenshot of a screen name, just so that we have a starting point should something happen.”*

— Julisa Abad, FMJP director of outreach and advocacy

in the local LGBTQ+ scene. He worked as a doorman at Gigi's, a popular gay nightclub in the city, where he was known for his warm personality and welcoming demeanor. As other outlets have reported, Brisendine was placed on the sex offender registry for an offense committed in 1996 — police have not indicated a connection between his record and the attack.

Luis Mandujano, the owner of Gigi's and Brisendine's friend and

their investigation.

Brisendine's brother, Harvey Brisendine, told WDIV that he was only able to identify his brother's body by a tattoo on his arm, as his face was unrecognizable from the attack. Harvey believes his brother was killed because of his sexual orientation, stating unequivocally that he thinks the crime was a hate crime.

"Howard was targeted for being gay," Harvey said to WDIV, "and I

want people to understand the deep pain this has caused our family."

Mandujano says the Gigi's family is reeling from the loss, as well. "Gigi's is family," he said. "We are friends and coworkers, really just one big family. And Howard was this warm, talkative guy with a big laugh who everyone knew and liked. It's a big loss."

For now we're going to keep moving forward as a community, as a business and a family."

While Al-Alikhan has not been formally charged with a hate crime, Maria Miller, an assistant prosecuting attorney for the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, said in an email that investigators are continuing to review the evidence. Detroit Police Sgt. Rebecca McKay also told WDIV that the investigation is "heading in that direction," and there are indications that this crime may have

been motivated by anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment.

Al-Alikhan's legal representation remains unclear, and Detroit police have not commented further on the case. BTL has reached out to several departments.

In the wake of Brisendine's death, Mandujano has launched a GoFundMe campaign to help cover funeral costs and Brisendine's remaining bills. The fundraiser, which has garnered significant community support, will also donate any leftover funds to local LGBTQ+ organizations working to combat hate crimes.

"Howard was a kind, talkative man who greeted everyone with a warm laugh and a kind word," Mandujano said in an email to supporters. "We don't want to take advantage of people's generosity, but we want them to know that Howard was the victim of a brutal murder simply because of who he was. He didn't deserve this."





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## Donald Trump and Republicans Banking on Anti-Trans Attacks to Win This Election



BY D'ANNE WITKOWSKI

As I write this, I am watching the Detroit Lions game against the Dallas Cowboys with my son. Football is not my thing. That is an understatement considering it perpetuates misogyny and toxic masculinity. But my 15-year-old son loves it. Watching football with him and listening to him patiently (usually) explain to me what is happening is a way to spend time with him and learn more about his interests.

My son is, well, very much a dude. Two moms raising a son who is so stereotypically masculine has led me to think a lot about gender over the years. Nature vs. nurture and all that. I believe that gender is a social construct and that it is not healthy for society at large to demand prescribed gender roles and identities. It is damaging to teach boys that they shouldn't cry or to teach girls that they have to be pretty above all else. I also believe that someone's gender identity and expression is firmly none of my business. It is not my job, or desire, to be the gender police. It is my job to treat other humans with decency and

*When the most powerful people in the country are pointing at transgender people as a clear and present danger, hatred and violence follow. And transgender people are in the crosshairs right now.*

kindness whenever possible. And that is what I have tried to teach my son.

Republicans, however, have nominated themselves to be the gender police. They are absolutely obsessed with gender. They believe that there are only two genders, that there are defined gender roles for males and females, and that there is a masculine or feminine ideal when it comes to gender expression. Any deviation is wrong.

This belief system fuels the fight against reproductive rights. The role of a woman is to be a bride, and then a

wife, and then a mother, by any means necessary.

It also fuels the Republican focus on transgender people who they are more than happy to demonize to score political points. And as we get closer to election day, the attack on transgender people keeps getting more and more vicious.

During the football game's commercial break, I watched a campaign ad attacking Vice President Kamala Harris and her support of transgender people. It was, quite frankly, awful. The ad claims that Harris "supports taxpayer-funded sex changes for prisoners and illegal aliens." The ad ends saying, "Kamala's for they/them. President Trump is for you" as images of people who are presumably transgender, or at least not gender-conforming, flash across the

screen.

The ad, of course, lacks context. Every political ad does. There's only so much you can cram into 30 seconds. According to FactCheck.org, part of the basis for the ad's claim is a 2019 ACLU questionnaire Harris responded to about transgender rights. "I support policies ensuring that federal prisoners and detainees are able to obtain medically necessary care for gender transition, including surgical care, while incarcerated or detained."

To which I say, so what? Advocating for medically

necessary care for prisoners isn't a radical stance. It's a humane one.

Unfortunately, Republicans do not say so what. Disgraced former president Donald Trump is leaning on anti-transgender hate heavily in his public comments and rallies. And it makes me sick and sad.

At a Sept. 23 rally in Indiana, Pennsylvania Trump said, "[Harris] even endorsed free sex changes...for illegal aliens in detention centers all over our country at taxpayer expense."

He's also said repeatedly that kids go to school and come back home days later having had a sex change.

There are so many huge issues to deal with in this country and Republicans have shown absolutely no interest in addressing these issues. They are hyper-focused on a very small and very vulnerable population of people and, by extension, their families. When the most powerful people in the country are pointing at transgender people as a clear and present danger, hatred and violence follow. And transgender people are in the crosshairs right now.

Republicans cannot run on making lives better for Americans, because they have not done that and aren't interested in doing that (unless you're very rich), and so they run on fear. The fear of immigrants, the fear of transgender people, the fear of anyone who isn't cis and white. Everyone else can get fucked.

Will this anti-trans ad attacking Harris gain Trump some votes or lose Harris some votes? I don't know. Most people's minds are made up at this point. Many people have already voted. I have. But the ad definitely shows that Republicans think that attacking transgender people is a winning issue. Let's hope they are wrong.





Evidence of Voter Support for Trans People in Swing States Like Michigan

A recent New York Times/Siena battleground poll highlights that voters in key states, especially Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin, overwhelmingly support societal acceptance of transgender individuals as their identified gender. In Michigan, for instance, 56% of voters endorse this acceptance, while only 34% oppose it. Notably, support is even higher among women (64%) and Independents (58%), with rural voters in these battleground areas also showing a narrow majority in favor (45% to 43%).

This polling data raises questions about the effectiveness of anti-trans

advertisements, particularly given the \$65 million financial investment by Republican campaigns (including \$15 million from the Trump campaign alone, according to The New York Times). Despite the onslaught of anti-trans ads, Democratic U.S. Senate candidates currently lead in these states. For example, Sen. Sherrod Brown is ahead in Ohio despite heavy criticism for his support of transgender individuals, while Elissa Slotkin in Michigan and Tammy Baldwin in Wisconsin also maintain leads.

The poll results suggest a disconnect between Republican strategies that emphasize anti-trans messages and the actual voter sentiment, which ranks LGBTQ+ issues as low priority compared to bread-and-butter concerns. Historical evidence indicates that focusing on anti-trans issues has not yielded electoral success for Republicans.



Confusion for Straight TikTokers Over 'Locktober'

Straight men have stumbled onto "Locktober," but they seem blissfully unaware it's not just about hitting the gym. On TikTok, bros are hyping up "Locktober Fest," promoting 30 days of clean eating, reading books and ditching vices.

Sounds wholesome, right? Well, the queer kink community has a different take — Locktober is about 31 days of chastity, where participants wear locked devices on their genitals, denying themselves orgasm as a test of willpower. Hilariously, both versions focus on discipline and even muscle gains. While these gym bros are flexing their meal plans, our kinky fam's out here flexing willpower with locked-up bits.

As gays poke fun, who knows — maybe these fitness bros are secretly hiding more under their gym shorts than just protein goals. If they stick with it, they might discover a whole new meaning to "lock in."



Kate McKinnon.  
Photo: Mattel Films

Cyndi Lauper's Farewell Tour Hits Detroit Oct. 24

Pop icon Cyndi Lauper is currently on her Girls Just Wanna Have Fun Farewell Tour, her first major tour in a decade. Produced by Live

Nation, the 23-city tour includes an Oct. 24 stop in Detroit at Fox Theatre featuring special guest Lu Kala, a rising pop artist.

Reflecting on this milestone, Lauper shared with BTL, "Well, hon', you know, right now I'm strong, and I can do an arena tour. I haven't done it in years — like a real bonafide arena. You can hear a lot of music for an hour and a half. Right now, I'm strong, and I can do it. But

in five years, I don't know what the heck. Sure, I'll probably sing because I love it, but I don't know that I would have the physical strength to do an arena tour. The people that can, God bless them."

Visit [313presents.com/events/detail/cyndi-lauper-for-tickets](https://313presents.com/events/detail/cyndi-lauper-for-tickets).

'Manhunt' Coming to the Small Screen

Trans horror fans, rejoice: Lilly Wachowski is creating a television adaptation of "Manhunt," Gretchen Felker-Martin's 2022 novel about a post-apocalyptic world where testosterone turns people into feral creatures. Felker-Martin shared the news on Instagram, posting, "The cat's out of the bag, baby." Wachowski told Autostraddle, "What if trans people could form this almost weather underground level of resistance? It becomes a murder mystery that goes up the ladder into the furthest reaches of government. We're going to bring this thing kicking, screaming, and queer as hell onto the screen."

Doc Focuses on the Lives of Intersex People

Now streaming on Peacock, "Every Body" is an eye-opening film that explores the journeys of intersex individuals moving from childhoods filled with shame and secrecy to empowered adulthood. It features the inspiring stories of River Gallo (they/them), Alicia Roth Weigel (she/they) and Sean Saifa Wall (he/him), who defy medical norms to embrace their true selves. As leaders of a growing movement, they advocate for intersex rights and understanding, shedding light on important issues, including past medical abuses.

Kate McKinnon Uses the Power of Weird for Good

Our favorite Weird (Queer) Barbie Kate McKinnon has published her first children's book, "The Millicent Quibb School of Etiquette for Young Ladies of Mad Science," and it's perfect Spooky Season material for all ages. The middle grades novel follows three misfit sisters who don't fit in their snobbish town or with their posh adoptive family. After being expelled from etiquette school, they receive a mysterious invitation to 231 Mysterium Way, where mad science reigns and adventures abound. Now, they must embrace their quirks to save their town from sinister scientists.



# Drag, Drama and Dancing: Your Guide to a Queer Michigan Halloween

Where to find the best frights and delights this spOooOky season



BY LIAM CLYMER

It's fall, darlings, and you know what that means: It's the season of slaying — both for our favorite slasher icons and all those who celebrate, as you get decked out in your stunning Halloween attire. It's a sacred time of campy queerness for the LGBTQ+ community, so we've picked some Halloween events from across Michigan with the most drama, just for you.

## October 18

### Murder at the Belcrest

9:30 p.m.-2 a.m., Common Pub Detroit (5440 Cass Ave., Detroit)

Taking place at Detroit's beautifully eerie historic Belcrest Apartments is a Halloween event with hauntingly decorated spaces, a costume contest and drag performances. Organizers say it's "the ultimate queer Halloween extravaganza — a night where everyone is welcome to live out their spookiest, most fabulous fantasies." [bit.ly/3YeosC9](https://bit.ly/3YeosC9)

### Drag is a Scream!

7 p.m., Weatherwax Hall (215 W. Michigan Ave., Jackson)

A fundraiser for Jackson Pride, Drag is a Scream! has a cauldron of goodies in store for you, including a drag show and concession-

style food. Attendees get a taste of the Halloween season, all the while supporting a good cause. [bit.ly/4ezcJnz](https://bit.ly/4ezcJnz)

## October 20

### Opulent Obscura: Bloody Sunday Bizarre

11 a.m.-8 p.m., Factory of the Dead Haunted House (906 Lapeer Ave., Saginaw)

Don your finest goth-glamor costume as you step into the world of Opulent Obscura. As the Factory of the Dead Haunted House is transformed into a bizarre realm filled with arts vendors, you'll also find a slew of other

spooky adventures: escape rooms, unique artisans, GellyBall, haunted attractions and much more. [bit.ly/3ZY0bSi](https://bit.ly/3ZY0bSi)

## October 22

### Miss Moscato's Cult of Dragula Viewing Party (with The Goddess Kelly)

7 p.m., General Wood Shop (507 Bridge St., Grand Rapids)

If "RuPaul's Drag Race" was Utica and A'Keria C. Davenport all the time, you might have something closer to "Boulet Brothers' Dragula," now in its sixth season on Shudder. Michigan drag queen and activist Miss Moscato

hosts a viewing party and show at General Wood Shop every Tuesday through Nov. 5. With a new special guest every week, there's something fresh in store with every viewing. [bit.ly/4gVigGu](https://bit.ly/4gVigGu)

## October 25

### Creepy Cheap Halloween Treat XVI

6:30 p.m., The Crofoot Complex (1 S. Saginaw St., Pontiac)

Fully costumed local cover bands will be rocking The Crofoot for two nights of aptly melodramatic Halloween fun. Attendees are encouraged to dress up, sbut to also really lean into the campiness of the event. Got something sitting in the closet that's ragged and cheap-looking? Wear it! "Don't settle for that phony sexy nurse outfit or some store-bought Batman crap — this is the real deal!" reads the Crofoot's website. "Halloween USA is good, and mom's basement is better... but doing your own last-minute rush-job to make that crappy Robocop armor out of aluminum foil and cardboard IS BEST!" Head back to The Crofoot on Oct. 26 for night two. [bit.ly/4ezpoXj](https://bit.ly/4ezpoXj)

### Scream Queens & Classic Scenes

6 p.m.-2 a.m., General Wood Shop (507 Bridge St., Grand Rapids)

With Miss Moscato hosting, an array of local DJs on hand and a costume contest, those attending General Wood Shop's annual Halloween party, "Scream Queens and Classic Scenes," are in for a real treat. And for those in Metro Detroit who haven't been to Grand Rapids in a while, now just may be the time to make the trip: a \$200

See **Halloween Calendar**, page 30



# **LGBTQ Rights and Respect Have Been Strengthened by the Michigan Supreme Court**

As the guardian of justice, fairness, and freedoms in our state, the Michigan Supreme Court plays an essential role in ensuring equality for all. This year, Michigan voters get to choose who fills two spots on the Michigan Supreme Court, and we all have a civic duty to vote for the two candidates we think will make the best decisions on behalf of all citizens.

The LGBTQ community has been granted important civil rights by the Michigan Supreme Court. It's no secret that members of this community still face discrimination, but recent decisions by Michigan's highest court have helped secure important protections against bias and unfair treatment for LGBTQ folks.

The Michigan Supreme Court ruled in 2022 that the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act, a law enacted in 1976, bans firing, evicting, or discriminating against someone in any way because they are a member of the LGBTQ community. Advocates worked for many years to get this case before the Michigan Supreme Court, which ruled that the law's ban on discrimination based on the basis of sex includes sexual orientation.

In 2023, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that judges must use the preferred pronouns of defendants, litigants, attorneys, and others in the courtroom. The Michigan Supreme Court was the first in the nation to require this change through court rules, which respects the dignity of all people. In fact, although the ruling especially impacts transgender and nonbinary folks, it also respects those who choose not to recognize people's preferred pronouns, allowing them to refer to "the defendant" or "the plaintiff." This is the kind of fairness and equity all Michiganders deserve.

Although these rulings were specific to the LGBTQ community, the Michigan Supreme Court makes decisions on critical issues that impact everyone. This includes civil rights for all, as well as environmental regulations, criminal justice, economic regulations, and more. In fact, the Michigan Supreme Court is the ultimate decider on the most complex and consequential cases in our state.

The two candidates who win their elections this year will have a major voice in how Michigan's future unfolds, along with the rest of the seven-person court. Each justice is elected for eight-year terms, which means your vote will help shape the future of our state for years to come.

Michigan is one of only 24 states that empowers the people to vote for their state Supreme Court. It's a big responsibility, so it's important to do your homework about the candidates so you know which two best reflect your values and the kind of Michigan you want to live in.

But you have to do more than your homework. You must manually select your two choices for the open seats on the Michigan Supreme Court. Feel free to vote a straight-party ticket – but don't stop there. Look for the non-partisan section of your ballot. That's where you'll find the candidates for the Michigan Supreme Court. They're nominated by a political party, but their affiliation is not listed on the ballot.

Don't miss your chance to play a role in making sure the Michigan Supreme Court is made up of qualified justices who will put the best interests of everyday Michiganders first – no matter their sexual orientation, gender identity, race, religion, or any other aspect of their lives. Choose candidates with integrity and a strong track record of fairness and justice for all.

Get more information about the Michigan Supreme Court, the voting process, and how to tell others about the importance of voting for the people who will sit on our state's highest court. Visit [www.MISupremeCourtRocks.com](http://www.MISupremeCourtRocks.com) to find everything you need to make an educated decision on your ballot in November.

-Erin Knott, Equality Michigan Executive Director





# How Gavin Creel Showed Midwesterners They Can Dream Big

Creel's life is a testament to knowing you can make it, no matter where you're from

BY JORDYN BRADLEY

It's not every day that a Broadway star takes an aspiring college student under their wing. A dream? Maybe. But Dominic Dorset from Saline, a 2022 graduate of the University of Michigan's musical-theater program, is still waiting for someone to pinch him.

Gavin Creel, a Tony-winning Broadway actor and U-M alum, reached out to Dorset in December 2020 and asked him to help him workshop a show he was trying to piece together, "Walk on Through: Confessions of a Museum Novice."

"That was all over Zoom. The first time I got to actually shake his hand was the following summer," Dorset tells BTL.

Creel graduated from U-M's School of Music, Theatre and Dance (SMTD) in 1998 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in musical theater. A proud alum from Findlay, Ohio, he regularly hosted workshops for young theater students like Dorset at the Ann Arbor campus. The two spent three days in New York "collaborating and bouncing ideas off each other" with other musicians, recalls Dorset.

"You took a chance and trusted me with your own story and your music, both of which I will never forget," he said in a tribute on Instagram.

Creel died on Sept. 30 at his Manhattan home after a brief battle with metastatic melanotic peripheral nerve sheath sarcoma, a rare form of cancer, according to publicist Matt Polk. He was 48.

Though he died at a young age, Creel left a lifelong impression on those who knew him personally but also those who didn't.

Creel made his Broadway debut in 2002 as Jimmy Smith in "Thoroughly Modern Millie." His performance earned him his first of three Tony nominations. He went on to work in other productions, such as "Hair," "La Cage aux Folles," "She Loves Me," "The Book of Mormon,"



Gavin Creel. Photo: gavincreel.com

"Waitress," "Into The Woods" and "Hello, Dolly!" Working opposite Bette Midler in the latter, he won the Tony Award for Best Featured Actor in a Musical for his role as Cornelius Hackl in 2017.

Creel also performed in productions in London's West End and made television and film appearances, including in "Eloise at the Plaza" and "Eloise at Christmastime," alongside Julie Andrews. He also released three original albums.

"It's a strange sensation mourning someone you've never met but whose voice you thought would always be there, making the

world a bit brighter and better," says Jake McClory from Royal Oak.

McClory remembers learning who Creel was after his performance in "Thoroughly Modern Millie." His choir teacher played songs from the musical, and when he asked his mom to buy him his own copy of the soundtrack, he heard Creel's song, "What Do I Need With Love."

"I was hooked," McClory says. "At that age, I was desperate to find songs by tenors that could show me new ways of singing — this was before YouTube and Spotify — and Gavin's crystal clear,

emotive singing was enthralling for me as an awkward 14-year-old gay boy. Once I figured out he was handsome too, it was game over."

McClory says Creel's work inspired him to audition for musicals in high school and played a role in his decision to study music at U-M.

"The idea that someone as good as him came out of a school just 30 minutes away blew my mind," he says.

While Creel was from Ohio, Dorset says in the U-M musical-theater department, he felt like "a hometown hero of sorts." Everyone knew who he was and the impact

he had, he says.

"Gavin's Midwestern roots, and how in touch he was with his background, made him a more sensational performer. [He] is a testament to anyone from a small community that you can use your roots, however specific they are, to pull from and create art that only you can create," says Dorset.

Season 11 "RuPaul's Drag Race" contestant Nina West, who also grew up in Ohio, acknowledged this very sentiment — that queer Midwesterners need other queer Midwesterners to look up to. "For so many of us, Gavin was the proof that it could happen for Ohio kids. The dream was something we could reach for because Gavin did it. The dream was always there, but Gavin was that proof — the real-life, tangible proof that it could happen," she wrote in an Instagram post.

Creel's "first grown-up decision" was actually outside of Ohio, when he decided to attend U-M, he shared with BTL in 2011. That decision wound up being life-changing. In his Tony acceptance speech for "Hello, Dolly!" in 2017, he even proudly dedicated his award to the U-M musical-theater department, saying, "My education there as a young person changed my life forever. My professors, my classmates, they instilled in me an appreciation for what it is to be an artist and what it is to be lucky to be part of this incredible community."

He then went on to encourage audience members to pitch in money to help fund scholarship programs so other young people could follow their dreams, like he did.

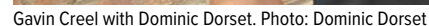
"Change someone's life the way Art and Marti Hearn changed mine," he said. Creel was a recipient of the Arthur and Martha Hearn Musical Theatre Scholarship as an SMTD student. Creel established his own student scholarship alongside SMTD classmate Celia Keenan-Bolger (BFA '00).



"I still love to belt 'What Do I Need With Love' while driving around," he says.

Joel Linguar, a 2022 U-M graduate who is now an L.A.-based filmmaker, says people like Creel help people from small communities feel like they can succeed. His Tony speech has stuck with Linguar, who is from Clare, near Midland, because he knew

Dorset, who calls Creel his mentor, says he had the “superpower” to make you better just by being around him. He also says Creel stressed that just because a show was being performed for



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# JINKX AND DELA, UNWRAPPED

Jinkx Monsoon and BenDeLaCreme head to Detroit for the holidays



Jinkx Monsoon and BenDeLaCreme. Photo: Jiji Lee

BY BENJAMIN JENKINS

This year for Christmas, all Jinkx Monsoon and Ben DeLaCreme want is peace on Earth, a Blue Wave, a night of passion with Krampus and to be murdered by Jennifer Tilly.

In a recent interview, we caught up with the drag icons: Jinkx, fresh off her Broadway triumph as Matron “Mama” Morton in Chicago and her breakout role as Maestro in “Doctor Who,” and DeLa, a trailblazing force in drag and the in-demand director behind numerous drag and queer artists’ one-person shows and concerts, including Monét X Change’s “Life Be Lifin.” Both are founding members of Drag PAC, an organization dedicated to fighting for LGBTQ+ rights and working to end anti-trans and anti-drag laws across the country.

The creative masterminds and stars of “The Jinkx and DeLa Holiday Show,” which heads to the Masonic Cathedral Theatre in Detroit on Nov. 25, spoke recently about how the show has evolved, their creative process and what new drag barriers they’ll be breaking.

## On the evolution of the Jinkx and DeLa holiday shows

**Jinkx:** Every year we create a brand new show, right? And that ain’t easy to do. In past years, we’ve only had about three weeks to write the show, build it, get everything in place, rehearse it, and then open it.

There was one year where we went to the U.K. We did about two shows, and the U.K. loved it. The show was great. Don’t question that. But that year, we realized that something about how we wrote the show was making the audience root for one of us or the other.

**Jinkx:** They were choosing sides in a show that has always been about coming together. Competition is not a bad thing. Competition produces good art. It inspires good art when it drives people to be their best. But what also produces good art is supporting one another. So DeLa carried the weight of doing some massive rewrites while I was keeping us on track to keep doing this version of the show in the U.K. So when we got to America, we hoped we’d fixed this unintentional thing that was happening in our show.

**DeLa:** It was crazy. I was literally doing rewrites between our shows of the current version, running them by Jinkx, but then we had to remember the current script. Then we landed in the U.S., had like one day of rehearsal and then put it on.

## Jinkx on ‘All Stars’ 7 format vs. traditional seasons

*As Jinkx and DeLa discussed how they’ve intentionally shifted away from a rivalry in their annual show, Jinkx recounted another opportunity to revisit an entertaining formula and demonstrate it can still work without adversarial tension: her victory on Season 7 of “RuPaul’s Drag Race All Stars” — the all-winners season.*

**Jinkx:** Our show is not the only example of that. I participated in “All Stars” [season] 7, and I feel like that was a huge celebration rather than a competition in the way we had previously seen it [on the show]. And to see everyone’s response to that sisterhood and camaraderie that we were able to experience when we removed the cutthroat element from the competition, that reassured me

**DeLa:** They were choosing sides.

See **Jinkx and DeLa**, page 24





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## ◀ The Longs

Continued from page 9

women's reproductive rights or simply any other right, like to marry who you love, to make sure that you can access healthcare or contraception, all of these things fall under that same right of privacy, and so they all continue to be in jeopardy. None of this is done, sadly."

Working alongside legislative leaders like openly gay Sen. Jeremy Moss and openly gay State Rep. Jason Hoskins, Whitmer pledged to continue to work to make Michigan "a state that the LGBTQ+ community can point to across the country as a state that's doing more, that's doing it right, and that is drawing people into our state because of our work here."

Meanwhile, more than 20 pieces of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation were introduced in Florida this year. Thanks to local advocacy groups and queer and allied Floridians, only one of them made it to Gov. Ron DeSantis' desk.

"Amber and I have often speculated if our lives and our daughter's life would have been different had we not moved from Florida to Michigan," says Ken. "With all things being equal, we couldn't fathom how much more complex it is for LGBTQ+ folks to live in a state that's actively legislating against your rights."

## Learning how best to support their trans kid

While the Longs are learning every day about their daughter's experience

being trans, they've made a strong effort to put much of the educational responsibility on themselves, rather than her.

"I decided personal questions about her, like, 'What do you want?' and 'How do you want to proceed?' I would bring to her, but any other kind of general education, I decided to take that on myself, or ourselves, through books, documentaries, movies, podcasts, all of it," says Amber.

exactly what I needed. Knowing that she can and will have joy in her life because of who she is just really put those fears to rest for me," she says.

The Longs say having others to relate to and navigate through the newness together makes them feel better equipped to support their daughter, too. Ken says that because he is not queer himself and doesn't fully know what it's like for his daughter, he likes to wear a Pride pin, not only to show



Ken and Amber Long. Photo: Andrew Potter

The parents also began researching organizations they could join to better understand how to be supportive of her, and to find local resources and community with other loved ones of queer people. That led them to joining PFLAG Detroit. Their first meeting was only a couple weeks after their daughter came out, and Amber says it immediately put them at ease.

"The opening speech of that meeting was about trans joy, and I started crying. And I think I cried the whole meeting," says Amber. "It was

his allyship, but to also take some of the potential targeting away from his daughter or other queer folks.

"It creates a bigger target for someone who might have nefarious intent, so they don't know which one of us is the queer person that they're trying to attack," Ken says. "And if I can do that and align myself with other folks in the LGBTQ+ community and take away a part of the burden of carrying a target on their back, that is worth it."

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**Lover of Men, But Not Self**  
Puzzle can be found on page 29

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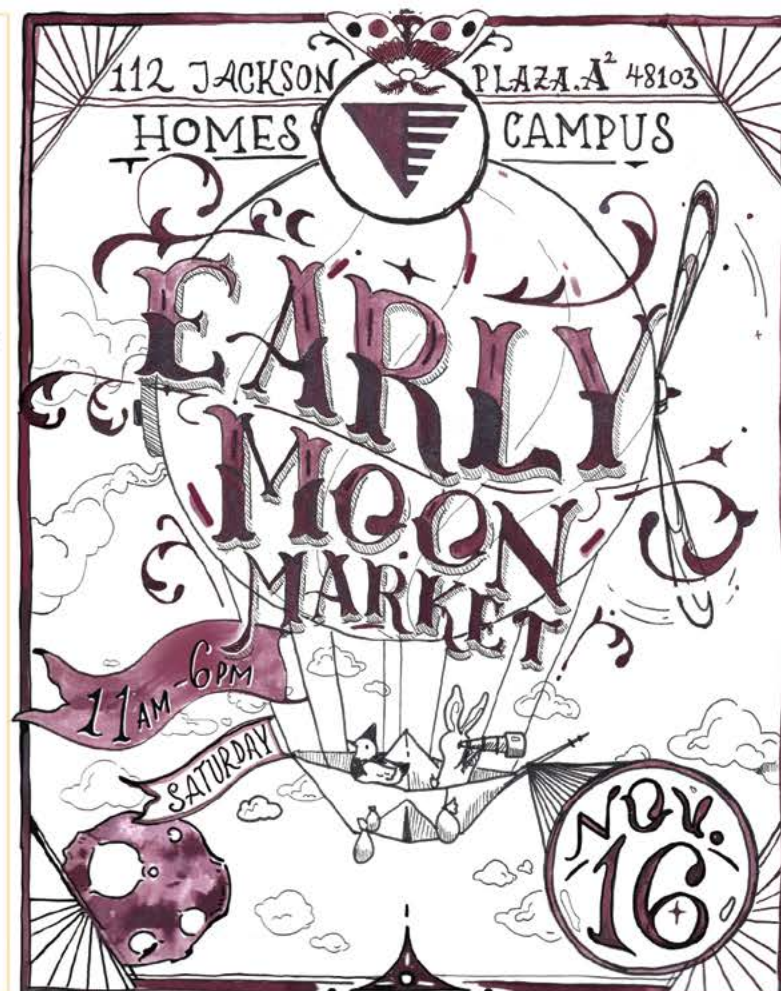
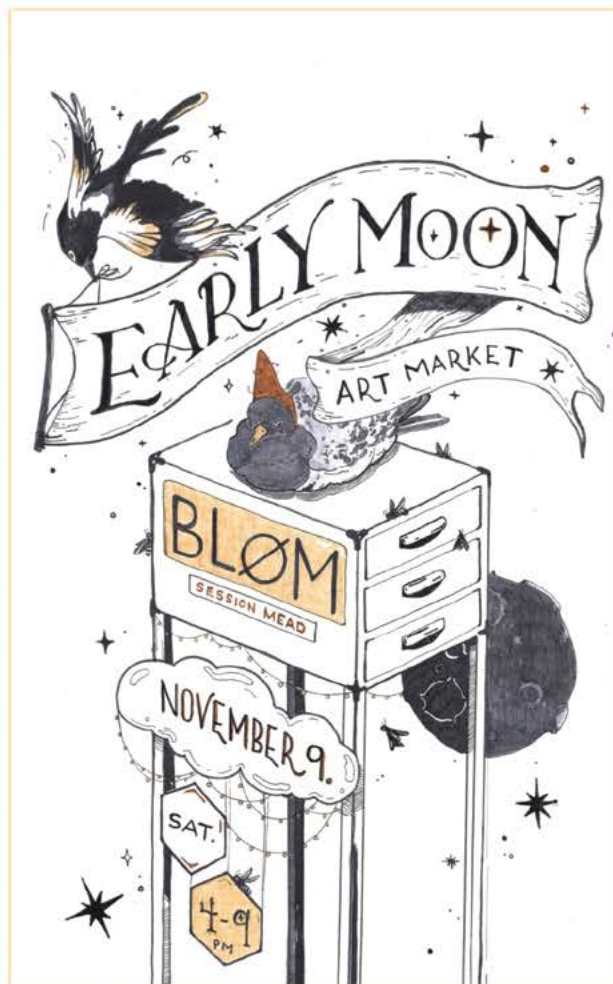
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# Zachary Quinto Is the TV Doctor We Need Now

The actor and activist on continuing to elevate queer stories



Zachary Quinto. Photo: NBC

BY CHRIS AZZOPARDI

Finding a gay doctor to address your health needs in real life is hard enough. The same has often been true on TV, where primetime medical dramas have typically opted for straight practitioners in lead roles.

But that's changing, thanks to Dr. Oliver Wolf, who happens to be openly gay, on the new NBC drama "Brilliant Minds." Zachary Quinto — not a doctor, but gay — portrays Wolf, who leads a team of interns studying the mysteries of the brain

*"I just feel like what I've learned from myself is that ultimately integrating with my authentic self, as complicated as that person might be, using that goal as a motivator in my own life, has transformed the way that I see the world and the way that I experience the world. And if that exploration within myself can resonate for other people and young people, whether they're aspiring to be actors or doctors or pilots or whatever, that's always been really important to me."*

in his neurology department in New York City.

"It's a big deal because it's not a big deal, actually," says Quinto, 47, best known for playing Spock in the new "Star Trek" movies and his roles on "American Horror Story." "Oliver Wolf's sexuality is a complex aspect of who he is as it is for any

human being. But it's by no means the only aspect of his personality or his experience."

To embody Wolf, Quinto pulled inspiration from a real-life doctor, the original basis for his character, who didn't come out until near the end of his life: Dr. Oliver Sacks, who was also a neurologist. Sacks died in 2015, at age 83. Cited as "the poet laureate of medicine" by The New York Times, he practiced during the mid to late 20th century, when being a gay anything, let alone a doctor, was far less accepted by society.

"Oliver Sacks had a very different experience of being a gay man than I have," Quinto says. "And he was actually celibate for 35 years. I think anybody who learns that about him says, 'How can someone be celibate for so long?' And I think the answer to that lies in the fact that at that time, gay identity was a singularly defining issue. And if you were a gay man in particular, then that is what you were — you were 'a gay,' whatever you did."

That's not true for Wolf, as the series establishes both his professional and sexual identity, with the potential for something more, given the obvious chemistry we see mid-season between him and a hot high school principal (Christopher Bencomo). Moreover, those exchanges are met as if he were just a straight doctor — that is, this isn't a show

about him being gay.

In speaking with Quinto, you get the impression that his character is not just inspired by Sacks, but an extension of what Sacks' life may have looked like outside of

See **Zachary Quinto**, page 26



# Hot Mic, Feisty Dykes

Rachel Scanlon dishes on 'Two Dykes and a Mic' live podcast show, coming soon to Royal Oak

BY SARAH BRICKER HUNT

Rachel Scanlon, comedian and co-host of the popular podcast "Two Dykes and a Mic," is set to bring her infectious energy and comedy to Royal Oak for a special live podcast recording as part of the "Two Dykes and a Mic: Topping Your Best Friend" tour. Known for her no-apologies take on queer identity and smart, sharp humor (she's the self-professed funniest dyke you've ever met — our internal fact check reveals this claim quite possibly to be true), Scanlon, along with co-host McKenzie Goodwin, has cultivated a devoted following within the LGBTQ+ community.

Scanlon recently collaborated with fellow LGBTQ+ comedians by taking part in queer-friendly apparel brand Wildfang's popular "gender-reveal" Instagram sketch, which skewers the concept of gender reveals involving pregnant people. In the sketch, which centers on Wildfang's CEO and her wife hosting a gender reveal event, Scanlon appears alongside Cameron Esposito and "SNL" cast member Punkie Johnson, posing questions like "Why don't we have goth babies?" and "If we're revealing genders, can I get one?"

As for Scanlon and McKenzie's podcast, celebrated for its fun, unfiltered sex-positive discussions and candid queer perspectives, it has taken the duo on a whirlwind of performances across the country. The Royal Oak show, set for Oct. 29 at the Comedy Castle, is a much-anticipated stop right before her own wedding. Audiences will have a front-row seat as the two lesbian BFFs create a podcast in real-time, perhaps diving into popular "Two Dykes" segments like bad dates ("Bumble Fumbles"), "Gay News" and relationship advice ("Ask a Dyke").

In an interview with BTL, Scanlon spoke about the upcoming show, the evolution of "Two Dykes and a Mic," and why she says queer



Rachel Scanlon. Courtesy photo

See **Rachel Scanlon**, page 28



and affirmed that people are just as happy — if not happier — to see us work together as they are to see us being catty and bitchy.

I don't think one [format] is better than the other. I think they both have entertainment, that they both have merit. Wonderful friendships were formed when I was in my regular season. What I want our audiences to know is that there's room

## How Jinkx and DeLa really feel about Christmas

*Earlier renditions of "The Jinkx & DeLa Holiday Show" made this clear: The character of Jinkx was not a fan of Christmas in the slightest, while the character DeLa simply couldn't get enough.*

**Jinkx:** The characters

“We have had moments where we have genuinely just thrown off the drag ego and supported one another on stage and the audience went 10 times more nuts for that than they have for our funniest moments of being at each other's throats.”

— Jinkx Monsoon

for all of it. There's room for queens who lip sync. There's room for queens who are more about fashion and visual spectacle, whereas we choose live theater and comedy as our way to communicate.

And we have had moments where we have genuinely just thrown off the drag ego and supported one another on stage and the audience went 10 times more nuts for that than they have for our funniest moments of being at each other's throats.

**DeLa:** Yeah, and I think we want to lead by example in a larger cultural way and, you know, we have a lot of real villains to fight and so we need to stop focusing on each other and get on the same page so that we can really make the kind of change that the queer community has so often made in the past through solidarity.

Also, sometimes people would talk to us trying to get us to jab at each other. We were like, “This is not our dynamic and if that's what you're getting out of it, we're going to tell you something different.”

of Jinkx and DeLa are what you just described. Whereas the human beings who created those characters — Christmas was my favorite time of year as a kid. And, yeah, I have some resentment toward it now because of my fervent anti-organized religion shtick [laughs], but DeLa had the opposite experience growing up. This show actually stemmed out of her hatred of Christmas.

**DeLa:** Yeah, I always hated going home for Christmas. It was all the things a family could be that makes you not want to go home for Christmas.

So, in 2007 I started doing Christmas productions with some other artists before Jinkx and I teamed up in 2018. And a lot of that was so I didn't have to go home for Christmas. I was like, “Well, I'm working Christmas Eve!” But that show ended up being, “Oh, you can have traditions. You can

have a sense of home. You can have a family to spend the holiday with if you build it yourself.” And that's the message that we have continued to spread.

And now I do love Christmas because this is how we celebrate Christmas. I also think it's funny that I know this, but not many other

*As the conversation shifted to what else the duo is working on, one pressing question had to be asked of Jinkx first: Will she try to sleep with the half-goat, half-demon monster Krampus once again in this year's show?*

**Jinkx:** Try to?! [Laughs.] Listen, every year the show is whatever it needs to be that



Jinkx Monsoon and BenDenLaCreme. Photo: Jiji Lee

people do: I really think of DeLa as a send-up of all the things I think are stupid.

## On Jinkx trying to sleep with Krampus again in the 'Holiday Show' this year

year, and we don't consider writing done until the show is up. So, I can't tell you that Krampus is or isn't coming back this year. What I can say is the costume exists. [Laughs.]

**DeLa:** You know, I can say that every single year there are things that happen [in the show] the year prior that people are like, “Are we going to see this again? Let us see



this again.” And then every single year we manage to make a show where people ask the same thing the following year.

So, I love that we create great new content every year, and when we do a “best of” show down the road, we’re going to have a hell of a “best of” show.

## On preparing for Carnegie Hall

*Jinkx and DeLa have many “firsts” to lay claim to when it comes to elevating and bringing drag entertainment to the masses. All their successes — Jinkx’s role as Matron “Mama” Morton in “Chicago” on Broadway, DeLa’s multiple director credits for several successful one-woman shows, their international “Holiday Show” — now have brought them to perhaps their greatest performance yet: A one-night-only concert directed by DeLa and starring Jinkx. So how does preparing for such a momentous performance differ from the annual “Holiday Show”?*

**Jinkx:** It was the same but different. The way we work, we have to first completely strip down the egos, strip down the judgment and just lean into the trust and respect that we have for one another.

DeLa and I have different ways of working that complement one another, but they’re very different. DeLa is bringing her meticulous eye for detail, her meticulous eye for storytelling, and her wonderful direction and production skills. She’s bringing all of that to a show that’s going to put me in the spotlight. And for that reason, she embraced my way of working more than when it’s the “Holiday Show.”

So it was kind of like the “Holiday Show” with just a little more lean toward Jinkx. But that’s why I asked her to direct it, because I knew that she was going to want to help me put on the best show to showcase Jinkx Monsoon at Carnegie Hall.

**DeLa:** When we do the “Holiday Show,” you can see both of our flavors in it, in full effect. And I’m glad that I had the opportunity to help write and direct some other shows before this, because I learned that one thing I really, really love is when my fingerprints aren’t really on it. When it really is just the best version of what that queen brings to this stage, I feel really excited. Because Jinkx is at the heart of this, and I get to help her shape something that is Jinkx.

**Jinkx:** And I don’t have to do all the work by myself. [Laughs]

## DeLa on being at the DNC

*Last August, DeLa joined Drag PAC co-founder Peppermint at the Democratic National Convention, speaking with delegates*

*and elected officials and talking about the issues affecting the LGBTQ+ community today — a first for the convention.*

**DeLa:** What an incredible moment. That was certainly somewhere I never imagined myself being and I got to connect with so many incredible people. I was talking to delegates. I was talking to elected officials. It was inspiring. You know, we have all been living in dread for quite some time, and feeling like there was a sense of hope to move toward. I mean, it was celebratory. And it was celebratory still with the space for disagreements.

There was a wide range of conversations happening and there were protesters outside and there was conversation between the people in the DNC and the protesters that was productive. So it was a really cool thing to be a part of and it was also a great thing to be able to make others feel more involved [in the process] as well.

## Jinkx on her ‘Doctor Who’ appearance and DeLa’s dream role

*On Season 14 of “Doctor Who,” Jinkx portrayed Maestro, the musical genderqueer villain who showrunner Russell T. Davies considers the Doctor’s most powerful enemy to date. But which cinematic universe would DeLa want to join?*


**Jinkx:** Oh, I’ll answer, I’ll answer. She wants to be in the “Chucky” series.

**DeLa:** I’m obsessed. I think [creator] Don Mancini is such a creative genius and he takes such big swings. And I just want to tag on that seeing Jinkx in that role of Maestro was so incredible and also felt so natural. I was like, “Of course, this is what’s happening.” But to see her channel all of our favorite Disney villains and beyond into something that felt completely new and authentic to her.


**Jinkx:** I just think amazing things can happen when you feel trusted and respected. I don’t always take big swings in situations because I’m scared to. Because I’m already the marginalized, odd duck here. If I take too big of a swing here, is this going to ruin my chance of being here? Is it going to ruin the next queer person’s chance to be here? But from the moment they called me to play the role, I was like, “OK, trust yourself, babe, this is your time; this is your time to show that we drag entertainers, queer entertainers, marginalized performers have every right to be there and we have all the talent to back it up.”

So it’s time to put us in these [roles].

**DeLa:** And I want Jennifer Tilly to murder me on screen.



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the doctor's office if he could have been out. What if the stakes hadn't been so high for Sacks to be openly gay? What if he could have still been a successful genius who published dozens of books about his patients and transformed the field of neurology while also being his authentic self?

"He knew that if he was honest about that part of himself, that he might not have been able to do any of that, or if he did it, it might not have been received or accepted by the mainstream to the degree that his work was," Quinto says about how high the stakes were for someone in Sacks' profession to be openly gay at the time. Coming out in that era, he added, "had the unfortunate occurrence of limiting your opportunities and diminishing the impact that you

might be able to make in a particular field because you were discriminated against or alienated or excised from the process or the conversation."

"It's a big deal for me, an openly gay actor, to be playing an openly gay character in a primetime network medical drama," he says. "But it's primarily because that aspect of the character is not really that big of a deal, and we live in a world for which that can be said. And that's the miracle of the progress we've made and the reminder of how much progress we need to continue to fight for to ensure that that narrative doesn't get interrupted or diverted."

So no, Dr. Wolf will not live a celibate life. "Yeah, that's a safe bet," Quinto confirms. It certainly helped to have a team of LGBTQ+ creatives bringing Wolf to life. Greg Berlanti, super-producer and founder of Berlanti Productions, was instrumental in getting "Brilliant Minds" off the ground. Berlanti wrote for "Dawson's Creek" before

going on to a successful producing and writing career for series such as The CW's "Riverdale" and "Brothers & Sisters" and making many contributions to DC Comics on film and TV. Meanwhile, Michael Grassi, also a "Riverdale" producer, is the showrunner.

"The people that you just mentioned are all very sensitive to and organically tied to that exploration and that representation, so it wasn't particularly effortful; it was just a part of the stories that they want to tell and the ways in which they tell the stories," Quinto says. "And that resonates for me. So there was a throughline and a connection that just made sense, really, with them."

As for Quinto himself, he's been publicly out since 2011, when he acknowledged being gay after the suicide of bisexual teenager Jamey Rodemeyer, who took his own life at 14. "In light of Jamey's death, it became clear to me in an instant that living a gay life without publicly acknowledging it

is simply not enough to make any significant contribution to the immense work that lies ahead on the road to complete equality," he posted on his website at the time.

"I just feel like what I've learned from myself is that ultimately integrating with my authentic self, as complicated as that person might be, using that goal as a motivator in my own life, has transformed the way that I see the world and the way that I experience the world," he says now. "And if that exploration within myself can resonate for other people and young people, whether they're aspiring to be actors or doctors or pilots or whatever, that's always been really important to me."

His work speaks for itself, and his success is a marker of the progress we've made that Sacks couldn't experience in his lifetime. Outside of "Brilliant Minds," Quinto has immersed himself in work that gives clout and voice to the queer experience. Those roles include the 2020 adaptation of "The



Zachary Quinto leads a team of neurologists on "Brilliant Minds." Photo: NBC





Teddy Sears and Zachary Quinto on "Brilliant Minds." Photo: NBC

Boys in the Band" for Netflix and "I Am Michael," the 2015 biographical drama based on The New York Times essay "My Ex-Gay Friend."

"It's always been something that's quietly motivated me, recognizing that we do have an opportunity, but we also have a responsibility to a younger generation to be a model of authentic integration," he says. "That's how I see it. And that was the moment when I made the decision to come out publicly — I could no longer separate those two things. This experience that I was having in my career with the great good fortune and many opportunities that I was being presented with, and a part of me that was split off from the truth of who I am."

"That has not always been the easiest thing to integrate or explore within myself, if I'm honest," he continues. "It generated my own inner conflicts and turmoils over the years to try to figure out how to do that. And I'm not saying I've solved it, but I'm certainly closer to it now than I would've been if I had tried to keep them separate. So that's a big part of this in terms of how it might reverberate for younger people or other people of any age, really."

As right-wing politicians continue to exploit queerness for political gain, often at the expense of LGBTQ+ youth, it's crucial for queer young people to recognize that they can thrive in society without sacrificing their identities. Quinto is aware of his role in helping to convey this message.

"What you're seeing is a real battle at the moment, between expanding consciousness and destructive consciousness and fear-based consciousness," he says. "So for me, this moment to be a part of stories that are very much leaning into the idea of expanding consciousness, that is something that I think is, again, somehow in a larger way, purposeful. And I'm recognizing that as it's unfolding, because it's all very real time. I'm in this moment of only now

just having these conversations in such a public-facing way."

With the election approaching and on everyone's minds, Quinto is using his public platform to address critical issues at the forefront of political discourse. He notes two of them — climate change and artificial intelligence — and poses an urgent question voters might ask themselves: "How can I participate in these conversations in a way that amplifies my belief that the only way we can meet, survive and potentially transcend the challenges facing humanity is through collective action?"

The actor emphasizes the current moment as one of unprecedented shifts in global consciousness. "This election is the clearest and most impactful distillation of that conversation and the ongoing battle," he says, noting that the decisions we make now will have profound consequences, reverberating not only across the U.S. but around the world. "It's urgent and crucial that we recognize the stakes involved," he adds.

These pressing issues, he insists, are fundamentally about the survival of the human race. "I say that anybody who has a meditation practice right now is like DEFCON 5, Red Zone: get to your meditation," he says. "We have to be focusing on the ways that we can move this conversation in the direction of the light and the direction of what's possible and the direction of how we can achieve things if we really come together and see that the things that are going to confront us don't know sexual identity. They don't know gay or straight or cis or trans. They don't know Republican or Democrat. They don't know American or European. They don't know these things, and they're not going to matter. What's going to matter is that we show up for each other and with each other to overcome the challenges and to solve the problems that we're going to have to solve and the challenges we're going to have to face."

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## ◀ Rachel Scanlon

Continued from page 23

joy and silliness are more important than ever.

The live podcast tour for “Two Dykes and a Mic” seems like it’s been a whirlwind, with shows across the U.S. and Canada so far. How are you doing?

I’m doing great! I’ve been touring a lot, which has been awesome, but I’m also getting married soon, so every time I’m home, I’m running around getting ready for that. I literally just got my marriage license today. Detroit is my last stop before the wedding. It’s all happening so fast, but I’m excited.

“Two Dykes and a Mic” has a big following at this point, but take us back to the start. What was your inspiration for the podcast?

So, I’m a stand-up comedian, and my co-host McKenzie Goodwin and I started the podcast after this wild experience I had running an open mic with my then-girlfriend. We actually broke up on stage during a show, and the audience thought it was a joke — but it was very real! After that, McKenzie reached out to me, and I thought she was hitting on me. Turns out, she just wanted to start a business together, which, honestly, is the gayest thing ever — starting a business with your lesbian best friend.

What’s been the most surprising thing about touring and performing live?

Honestly, it’s been the queer community. Growing up, I didn’t really have queer friends, and I never thought I’d be part of something like this. Touring with the podcast and seeing these incredible, diverse queer communities has been healing. It’s not just about the comedy; it’s about creating a space where people can feel seen and celebrated.

The live show is like snorting pure queer joy! It’s high-energy, interactive and way more dynamic than just two dykes sitting on a couch. McKenzie and I are both comedians, so we bring that live-

performance experience to the stage. We play games, interact with the crowd and just let loose. If people love the podcast, the live show is like that, but dialed up to 10.

How do you think the podcast and your live performances resonate with the LGBTQ+ community, especially during this political era, where queer people are routinely targeted?

It’s such a tough time for our community right now, with so much uncertainty and fear. But that’s exactly why creating spaces for laughter and joy is so important. When politics directly impacts you and your loved

“Touring with the podcast and seeing these incredible, diverse queer communities has been healing. It’s not just about the comedy; it’s about creating a space where people can feel seen and celebrated.”

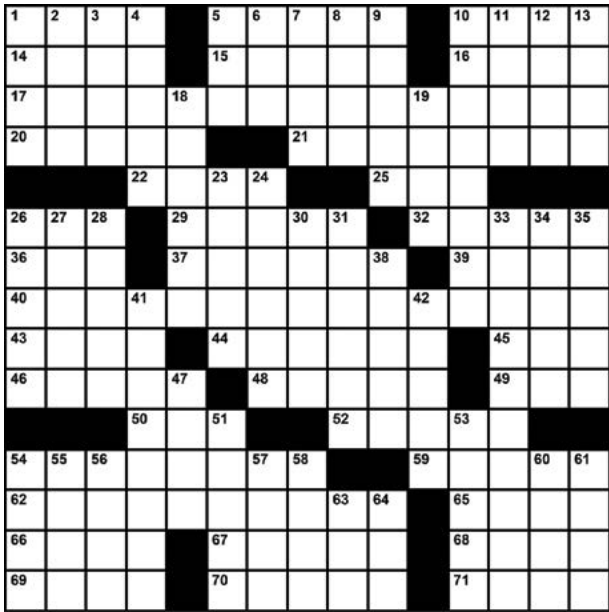
ones, it feels very personal. Our show gives people a place to come together, feel safe and just have fun. It’s more than just laughs — it’s about community, friendship, and a break from the heavy stuff.

That’s so important. Lastly, any advice for those attending the show who are new to the “Two Dykes and a Mic” podcast?

Oh, if you’ve never heard of us, just know this: Our show is unlike anything else you’ll see. It’s all about queer joy, silliness and realness. We bring a unique energy that’s both hilarious and heartfelt. If you want to laugh, feel good and connect with other queer folks, come to the show and bring your friends. You won’t regret it!

“Two Dykes and a Mic: Topping Your Best Friend Tour,” Oct. 29, 7:30 p.m., Mark Ridley’s Comedy Castle (310 S. Troy St., Royal Oak). Find tickets at twodykesandamic.com.





Lover of Men, But Not Self

Across

- 1 Label on a lemon that isn't a fruit
- 5 Robin portrayer O'Donnell
- 10 Big bell sound
- 14 Stein's "A Long Gay Book,"

- e.g.
- 15 Vocalize softly
  - 16 "Lord of the Rings" singer
  - 17 Start of Lincoln's reply when he was accused of being hypocritical
  - 20 "Dykes to Watch Out For" section
  - 21 The Kit Kat Klub and others
  - 22 Kind of IRA
  - 25 Caesar's thus
  - 26 The Eagle, to NASA
  - 29 One who does it doggy style
  - 32 Andean pack animal


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- 44 Yankee Doodle Dandy, to Uncle Sam
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- 50 Use your tongue
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- 54 Top athletes
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- 65 Alternatives to asses
- 66 Current Amsterdam currency
- 67 Family room piece
- 68 The M in Y.M.C.A.
- 69 A Brit soldier may shoot it off
- 70 Your gardener's tool
- 71 Petrol station choice

Down

- 1 What you can take from me
- 2 Love seat, e.g.
- 3 Top's betting phrase?
- 4 Head helper
- 5 "Suzie Q" band, for short
- 6 Bygone Eur. realm
- 7 Campus mil. org.
- 8 "The Music Man" setting
- 9 Some A-List gays
- 10 Bakery treat for a hairy guy?
- 11 Years ago
- 12 No, to Nureyev

- 13 Wanders aimlessly
- 18 Split to unite
- 19 Blow it
- 23 Lethal agent
- 24 Place of fast-growing sexual activity?
- 26 Sculptor Edmonia
- 27 Name on a bomber
- 28 Like a computer clicker?
- 30 Paper used in Pride parade floats
- 31 Chops finely
- 33 Amelia Earhart and others
- 34 News source in gay Paree, with "le"
- 35 Melissa Ethridge's "Talking to My \_\_\_\_"
- 38 Hite of sexuality
- 41 "Shakespeare in Harlem" poet Hughes
- 42 Buck of C&W
- 47 Scout's promise to be "morally straight"
- 51 Prepares to cast
- 53 Carol's opening
- 54 Seaman's pair
- 55 Ill-mannered oaf
- 56 Seduce
- 57 Say whether or not you're coming
- 58 Sammy once of the Cubs
- 60 Peaty areas
- 61 \_\_\_\_ many words
- 63 Composer Rorem
- 64 Summer for Rimbaud


See p. 20 for answers



YOU'RE INVITED TO OUR


# Holiday Preview Event

Friday, October 18<sup>th</sup>  
9:30 AM - 5:30 PM



Saturday, October 19<sup>th</sup>  
9:30 AM - 5:00 PM



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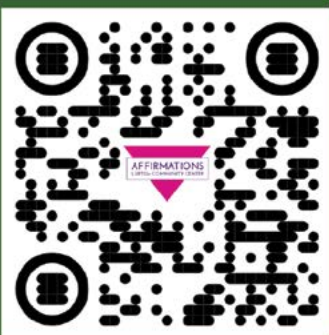


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## Halloween Calendar

Continued from page 14

gift card prize is awaiting the winner of best costume. [bit.ly/3NeKePY](https://bit.ly/3NeKePY)

### Necto Pride Halloween

8 p.m., Necto (516 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor)

You know that Ann Arbor’s queer-inclusive bar, Necto, isn’t about to let the Halloween season pass by without honoring it properly. So on Oct. 25, Halloween Pride will fill the iconic space with sound — featuring two separate Halloween-themed rooms, each with their own DJ, and a costume contest. Necto is urging clubgoers to “dress to impress” for “the campiest Halloween party in Michigan!” [bit.ly/4eY6cST](https://bit.ly/4eY6cST)

### Cauldron: Thots & Prayers Halloween

10 p.m.-4 a.m., Orchid Theatre (141 W. Nine Mile Road, Ferndale)

One of the biggest year-round queer dance parties, Thots & Prayers, is getting the Halloween treatment, as decorations, dancers and DJs Deanne and Dan Slater will be setting the

scene for what organizers are calling “Detroit’s hottest gay Halloween event.” [bit.ly/3U2CCUu](https://bit.ly/3U2CCUu)

## October 26

### Halloween at Castle Hall

7 p.m., Castle Hall (1942 Grand River Ave., Detroit)

It’s still weeks away, but Halloween at Castle Hall is already giving so much drama. A creepy, old building? Check! A requirement to dress to the nines and wear masquerade masks? Check, check! If moodiness-meets-luxury is your thing, this one’s for you. [eventsatcastlehall.com](https://eventsatcastlehall.com)

## October 27

### Halloween Drag Brunch

12-2:30 p.m., Sidetrack Bar and Grill (56 E. Cross St., Ypsilanti)

This brunch won’t have a dull moment, not with Ann Arbor queen Jadein Black and a cadre of other talented performers leading it. Event proceeds will be donated to Ozone House, an Ypsilanti organization that provides shelter, safe spaces, transitional housing and counseling to homeless youth and LGBTQ+ runaway teens. [bit.ly/3NiAB2M](https://bit.ly/3NiAB2M)


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Detroit, MI 48205  
248 544-9300



### Community Health Awareness Group

1300 West Fort St.,  
Detroit, MI 48226  
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### Liv Well Clinic

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Dr. Benson and Dr. Bornstein



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